

Outlook

A Slice of Life

We have quite a few specialists here at Glenair: dedicated scientists who are world-class experts in formulating polymers for jacketing and seals, guru-level plating and surface-coating technicians, manufacturing engineers who are zen-masters of fixture fabrication, product managers who can recite the DLA Mil-Specs for their products virtually by heart. In fact, to a great extent, our entire organization is made of individuals who have—for better or worse—achieved singular levels of fluency in their area of expertise.

For “for better or worse” you say? What’s that all about? Isn’t our “mosaic” of specialized skills what makes us such a powerful competitor? Usain Bolt is an insanely accomplished “specialist” in his field—an Olympic-class sprinter! I don’t hear many criticisms of his quest to become the fastest man on Earth. Ditto world champion boxer Mohammed Ali, or baseball slugger Barry Bonds—all specialist that absolutely excelled in their chosen areas of expertise. When viewed from this perspective, isn’t specialization a perfect formula for success?

Yes, of course. But the rub is always “opportunity cost.” The the better you get at just the one thing, the less likely it is that you can adapt and contribute to general problems that fall outside of that one zone of competence. Usain Bolt, for all his prowess as a sprinter, would fail miserably in a multi-event competition such as a decathlon. As dominant in the ring as Mohammed Ali was, he would find himself at a severe disadvantage in a mixed martial arts contest where the fighters combine boxing, wrestling, kick-boxing and other disciplines in their attacks.

For better or worse, we all tend to dig in and focus on that one “slice of life” that comes to us most naturally. Barry Bonds was born to hit home runs. But he also ended-up number three on the all-time career list for the most strike-outs. You get the point. Becoming a career specialist in just one area inevitably creates weaknesses in other parts of your game.

For this reason we like to counsel folks to always make the effort to look to the right and left of their particular slice of the pie. A design engineer, for example, would surely benefit from shifting his eyes left—to the customer—to better appreciate their unique, and perhaps changing requirements, rather than just assuming his own expertise is enough to answer every question. Likewise, looking right—to the factory floor—will surely pay dividends. How else to gain perspective on the “manufacturability” of his design? So many potential problems are easily solved simply by shifting one’s focus to the left (talk to that customer!) and to the right (get out on the shop floor!) instead of relentlessly focusing on just your own slice of life. And by the way, isn’t this is exactly the formula that has helped us dig out from under our mountain of late jobs? Congratulations and thanks to all of you that stepped outside of your comfort zone to get us back on track.

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